

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Statement

STATEMENT OF
MR. WILLIAM P. HORN
FOR
THE WILDLIFE LEGISLATIVE FUND
OF AMERICA
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON H.R. 4442,
THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM CENTENNIAL ACT
JUNE 15, 2000

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the Wildlife Legislative Fund of America (WLFA) we thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. We appreciate your interest and continued commitment to the Refuge System and your leadership in addressing the National Wildlife Refuge System Centennial Act through hearings such as this.

The 1.5 million sportsmen and sportswomen WLFA represents are committed to conservation of our unparalleled Refuge System and maintaining appropriate outdoor activities including such as hunting, fishing, and trapping on these public lands. We are also pleased to be a member of the C.A.R.E. group and to have the chance to work cooperatively with the variety of organizations which belong to it.

The NWRS has a long and distinguished history as an institution for conservation. In 1903, when Teddy Roosevelt established the first Refuge at Pelican Island, he and fellow angling and hunting conservationists envisioned a network of Federal lands to specifically benefit wildlife. Since its early beginnings, the NWRS has effected the conservation of our nation's most valuable natural resources. The sporting community is proud of its role in creating and sustaining the Refuge system. Today, wildlife on the NWRS is thriving -- a tribute to the vision of America's conservationists.

Wildlife-related recreation on the 92 million-acre NWRS is thriving. Fully compatible hunting, fishing, and trapping activities occur on over 260 units of the System and migratory bird hunting occurs on nearly one-third of the NWRS units. Hunters log over one million visits annually to the System. These public Refuge lands play a critical and increasingly important role in providing wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities to America's sportsmen and sportswomen.

We appreciate that Congress has long recognized this role. The enactment of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (NWRISA) three years ago outlined that support. NWRISA explicitly states that wildlife dependent recreation is a priority public use of the Refuge system. It also recognizes that hunting and fishing are compatible with fish and wildlife conservation and the principles of fish and wildlife management, and emphasizes that units be open to these activities unless there are specific reasons, such as public safety, to make a closure.

Legislation to elevate the profile of this important public land system and recognize its contributions to conservation is in the public interest. Outside of the angling and hunting community, and among birders and other wildlife enthusiasts, the broad public is often unaware of the Refuge system. This system, larger than the National Park system, is all too often the ignored step-child when it comes to public attention and interest. We would hope that the pending legislation would help correct this situation.

As we approach this centennial, we are concerned, however, about management of the Refuge system and implementation of NWRISA. We hear reports that, during the ongoing Comprehensive Conservation Plan process for units of the Refuge system, the Service is taking a too narrow view of wildlife management activities (e.g., Cabeza Prieta) and the ability to continue traditional and compatible activities on these refuges. We are alarmed at reports that Service officials are arbitrarily deciding that activities such as trapping are not appropriate or compatible uses of refuge land.

The Subcommittee should act favorably on the Centennial, bill but we ask that you maintain vigilant oversight to assure that the Service faithfully implements NWRISA, and recognizes the appropriate role of hunting, fishing, and trapping on Refuge lands as they prepare and finalize the CCPs for each unit.

The Refuge system has achieved great success and we look forward to working with Congress and the Fish and Wildlife Service to continue the legacy of wildlife conservation and wildlife dependent recreation on Refuge lands for the next 100 years.

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